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EASTERN PENITENTIARY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

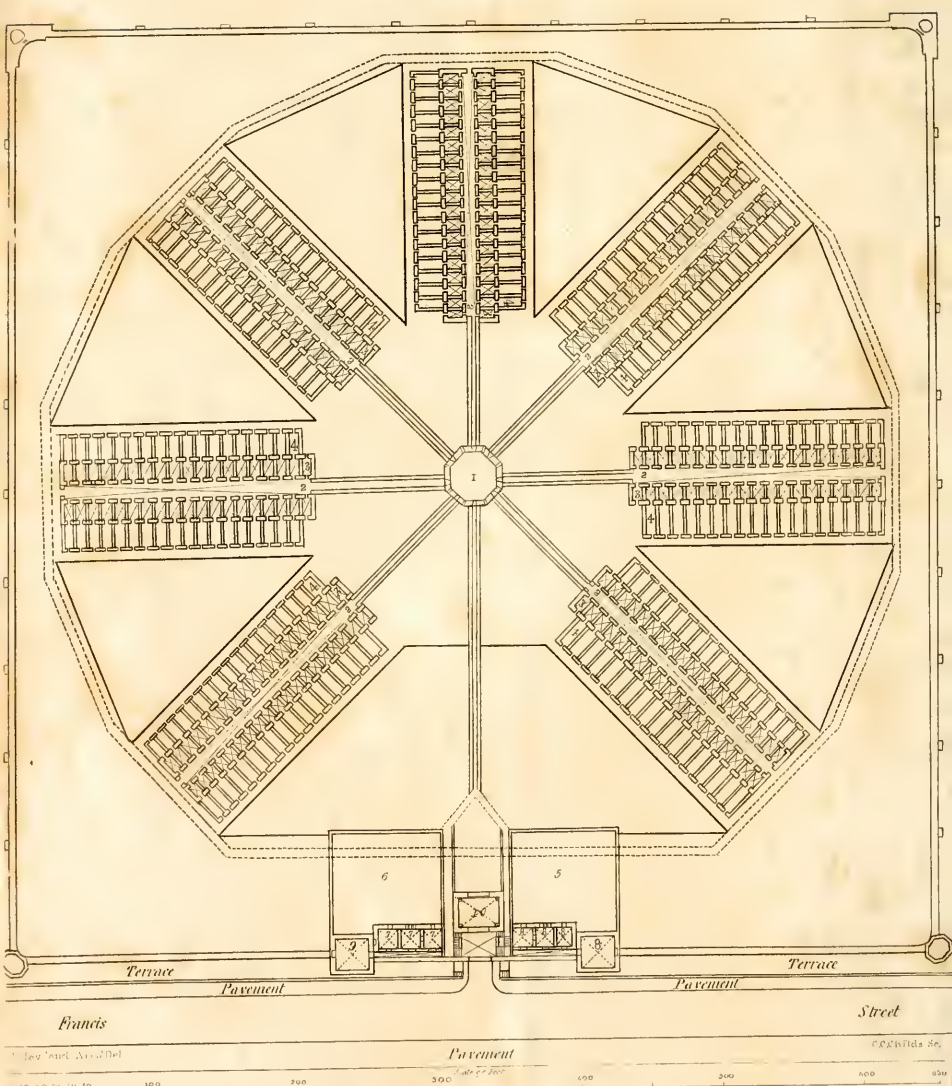
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PLAN OF THE EASTERN PENITENTIARY.



Observatory. 2. Corridor. 3. Cells. 4. Yards to Cells. 5. Wardens Garden. 6. Domestic Garden. 7. Keepers apartments over these is the hospital and beneath are the kitchens and offices. 8. Wardens apartments. 9. Inspectors apartment or which are two hospital rooms. 10. Base of the great tower over which is the apothecarys office above which is the bell.

A VIEW

AND

DESCRIPTION

OF THE

EASTERN PENITENTIARY

OF

PENNSYLVANIA.



PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED FOR THE PHILADELPHIA SOCIETY FOR ALLEVIATING
THE MISERIES OF PUBLIC PRISONS,
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1830

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DESCRIPTION

OF THE

Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania.

THE prevention of crimes and the reformation of criminals, in lieu of the vindictive infliction of pain on offenders, are *now* almost universally acknowledged to be the only legitimate objects of human punishments. Policy and humanity equally dictate the application of severity sufficient to prevent offenders repeating their crimes, and to deter others from following their example. The intentional addition of any further suffering constitutes cruelty. However obvious this theory may appear at the present day, its justice has been but recently acknowledged; and in practice it is to the present hour almost unknown throughout the greater part of Christendom. The gratification of vengeance and securing the persons of convicts to prevent the *immediate* repetition of offences, appear to have constituted the only design of imprisonment, until near the conclusion of the last century. In the prisons at that period, the mixture of all ages, ranks, and sexes, into one corrupting leavened mass of shameless iniquity, and the unrestrained intercourse which was permitted day and night, rendered the consignment of a juvenile offender to these abodes of depravity, a certain sentence of moral death: he who entered their gates a novice in guilt, accomplished his education in villany, and leaving character, shame, independence, and every incentive to voluntary industry and virtue within their walls—departed an adept in crime, ignorant only of his duties; prepared to practise at the expense of society, those lessons of vice which its folly had forced on his acquaintance, and almost compelled him to exercise as a profession when discharged.

Ms. A. 9. 2. 6-48

Such was the condition of these colleges of vice, as they have been too correctly denominated, when the *first* association for the purpose of ameliorating Prison Discipline was formed in Philadelphia on the 7th of February, 1776. This society is therefore entitled to the distinguished honour of leading the way in this novel and important subject. It is the venerable parent of the numerous institutions for the promotion of similar objects which are now in active progress throughout the world. The revolution suspended the existence of this association, which was however revived in 1787, under the name of the Philadelphia Society for alleviating the miseries of Public Prisons, and has ever since continued to pursue its labours of benevolence.

The contamination resulting from the association of prisoners, and the prejudicial effects resulting from their acquaintance with each other, induced this body to petition the legislature to separate the convicts, and finally to adopt the only effectual system, viz.—separate or solitary confinement. The celebrated law which was enacted April 5th, 1790, authorized the construction of 30 solitary cells, which were consequently built and occupied. Numerous other improvements were introduced, the effects of which were soon visible in the reduced number of convictions, and in the reformation of the inmates of the prison. This institution, the first in which the system of solitary or separate confinement was adopted, rapidly acquired celebrity throughout the Union, and many parts of Europe, where it has been subsequently imitated. During the last year, upwards of 4000 convicts have been sentenced to solitary confinement in the kingdoms of Great Britain and France alone.

Causes, which it is unnecessary to describe, in a few years crowded this Penitentiary with inmates, and consequently rendered the operation of the new system almost impracticable. Repeated memorials of the society, and of other philanthropists, finally induced the Legislature of Pennsylvania, in 1817, to authorize the construction of a prison at Pittsburg; and in 1821, another at Philadelphia, in which the separate confinement of every convict day and night could be fully ac-

complished. The latter of which is the subject of the present notice.

The Eastern State Penitentiary is situated on one of the most elevated, airy, and healthy sites in the vicinity of Philadelphia. Large sums have been expended for the purpose of giving an unusual degree of solidity and durability to every part of this immense structure, which is the most extensive building in the United States. The ground occupied by it, contains about 10 acres. The material with which the edifices are built, is a greyish granite, or gneiss, employed in large masses; every room is vaulted and fire proof.—The design and execution impart a grave, severe, and awful character to the external aspect of this building. The effect which it produces on the imagination of every passing spectator, is peculiarly impressive, solemn, and instructive. The architecture is in keeping with the design. The broad masses, the small and well proportioned apertures, the continuity of lines, and the bold and expressive simplicity which characterize the features of the façade, are most happily and judiciously combined. The originality of the plan, the excellent arrangement and execution of the details, display the taste and ingenuity of the architect, to whom our country is indebted for some of her noblest edifices—our fellow citizen, Mr. John Haviland. The laborious and gratuitous services of John Bacon Esq., the Chairman of the Building Committee, and of some of the other Commissioners, are entitled to our gratitude. The total cost of this building when finished, will be four hundred and thirty-two thousand dollars. We are not advocates of inconsistent or meretricious decoration, but we may express our gratification that no unwise parsimony rendered the aspect or arrangements of this institution an opprobrium to the liberal, humane, and enlightened character of our commonwealth.

This Penitentiary is the only edifice in this country which is calculated to convey to our citizens the external appearance of those magnificent and picturesque castles of the middle ages, which contribute so eminently to embellish the scenery of Europe.

A reference to the accompanying view and plan will render only a brief description necessary. The front of this building is composed of large blocks of hewn and squared granite; the walls are 12 feet thick at the base, and diminish to the top, where they are $2\frac{3}{4}$ feet in thickness. A wall of thirty feet in height above the interior platform, encloses an area 640 feet square: at each angle of the wall is a tower for the purpose of overlooking the establishment; three other towers, which will be presently described are situated near the gate of entrance. The façade or principal front which is represented in the accompanying view is 670 feet in length, and reposes on a terrace, which, from the inequalities of the ground, varies from 3 to 9 feet in height; the basement or belting course, which is 10 feet high, is scarped, and extends uniformly the whole length. The central building is 200 feet in length, consists of two projecting massive square towers 50 feet high, crowned by projecting embattled parapets, supported by pointed arches resting on corbels or bracketts. The pointed munnioned windows in these towers contribute in a high degree to their picturesque effect. The curtain between the towers is 41 feet high, and is finished with a parapet and embrasures. The pointed windows in it are very lofty and narrow. The great gateway in the centre is a very conspicuous feature; it is 27 feet high, and 15 wide, and is filled by a massive wrought iron portcullis, and double oaken gates studded with projecting iron rivets, the whole weighing several tons; nevertheless they can be opened with the greatest facility. On each side of this entrance, (which is the most imposing in the United States,) are enormous solid buttresses diminishing in offsets, and terminating in pinnacles. A lofty octangular tower, 80 feet high, containing an alarm bell and clock, surmounts this entrance, and forms a picturesque proportional centre. On each side of this main building (which contains the apartments of the warden, keepers, domestics &c.,) are screen wing walls, which appear to constitute portions of the main edifice; they are pierced with small blank pointed windows, and are surmounted by a parapet; at their extremities are high octangular towers terminating in parapets pierced by

embrasures. In the centre of the great court yard is an observatory, whence long corridors, 8 in number, radiate: (three only of these corridors, &c., are at *present* finished.) On each side of these corridors, the cells are situated, each at right angles to them, and communicating with them only by small openings for the purpose of supplying the prisoner with food, &c., and for the purpose of inspecting his movements without attracting his attention; other apertures, for the admission of cool or heated air, and for the purpose of ventilation, are provided. A novel and ingenious contrivance in each cell, which has been frequently described, prevents the possibility of conversation, preserves the purity of the atmosphere of the cells, and dispenses with the otherwise unavoidable necessity of leaving the apartment, except when the regulations permit: flues conduct heated air from large cockle stoves to the cells. Light is admitted by a large circular glass in the crown of the arch, which is raking, and the highest part 16 feet 6 inches above the floor, (which is of wood, overlaying a solid foundation of stone.) The walls are plastered and neatly white-washed; the cells are 11 feet 9 inches long, and 7 feet 6 inches wide: at the extremity of the cell, opposite to the apertures for inspection, &c., previously mentioned, is the doorway, containing two doors; one of lattice work, or grating, to admit the air and secure the prisoner; the other composed of planks to exclude the air, if required; this door leads to a yard (18 feet by 8, the walls of which are $11\frac{1}{2}$ feet in height) attached to each cell. The number of the latter in the present plan is only 266, but it may be increased to 818, without resorting to the addition of second stories. We have had an opportunity of examining many prisons, and other similar institutions in Europe and this country; but we have never seen a building so admirably adapted to the purposes of security, seclusion, health and convenience, as this Penitentiary. The rooms are larger, viz. containing more cubic feet of air, or space, than a great number of the apartments occupied by industrious mechanics in our city; and if we consider that two or more of the latter frequently work or sleep in the same chamber, they have much less room than will be allotted to

the convicts; whose cells, moreover, will be more perfectly ventilated than many of the largest apartments of our opulent citizens.

— The convict, on his entrance, after the customary examination, ablution, medical inspection, &c., is clothed, blindfolded and conducted to his cell, where he remains locked up; and after a patient and careful inquiry into his history, and the delivery of an appropriate address to him on the consequences of his crime, and the design to be effected by his punishment, he is abandoned to that salutary anguish and remorse which his reflections in solitude must inevitably produce. Every means which have been devised by philanthropy and experience for effecting reformation will be zealously applied. The labour in which the convict will be employed, is considered as an alleviation, not an aggravation of his sentence. Labour prescribed as a *punishment* is an error in legislation, founded on an ignorance of the feelings, the desires and antipathies, the habits and associations, of mankind: the tedious hours spent in solitude will be a punishment sufficiently severe, without rendering the infliction of hard labour, *for this cause*, necessary. The want of occupation will produce a feeling of tedium or irksomeness—the state of mind in which labour or employment will appear to the convict—perhaps for the first time in his life, as a means of preventing uneasy feelings, of producing relief and pleasure; and as the powerful influence of association is acknowledged, this beneficial feeling will become habitual, and after the discharge of the convict from his durance, will be a most effectual safeguard from the temptations of idleness. Accordingly persons duly qualified are employed to teach the prisoner suitable trades, and to instruct him in religion, and in the elements of learning. The prohibition of all intercourse with society, is not, therefore, continual; the visits of the *virtuous* cannot injure, and must benefit the majority of the prisoners, between whom, *alone*, all communication is rendered impossible. The degree of seclusion to be practised, or of labour and other alleviations permitted, may be varied with the varying dispositions of the prisoners. Regular exercise in the yards, in the open air, is

permitted, and required when necessary; provided that no two adjoining yards be occupied at the same time, for the purpose of preventing conversation.

From this outline of the system it is obvious that the charge of cruelty, which ignorance and misrepresentation have attempted to attach to it, is untenable. The humane and intelligent, who have sanctioned its adoption in our community almost unanimously, certainly require no defence of the purity of their motives. Among the advocates of this system in Europe, we may refer to Howard, Paul, Eden, Mansfield, Blackstone, Paley, Liancourt, Villermé, &c.; and in this country, to the venerable Bishop White, whose whole life has been but one prolonged illustration of that religion which he professes, Dr. Rush, Bradford, Vaux, Wood, Sergeant, Livingston, and many of our most eminent citizens. The intrinsic and obvious excellence of the plan afforded a powerful argument for its adoption upwards of 40 years since. The partial experience of its merits has been beneficially experienced in our State and other parts of the Union, notwithstanding the numerous disadvantages which have heretofore attended the trial. The only failures which have occurred in other States, are unquestionably attributable to the absurd and culpable manner in which the process has sometimes been conducted. The experience of several of the European states, as well as of our own commonwealth, incontestably proves that this system of Prison discipline is the most efficient which the wisdom of philanthropists has heretofore devised; that, when administered in a proper manner, the reformation of the great majority of criminals is practicable; that no injury to the health, mental or bodily, of the convicts, occurs; that the severity is sufficient, not only to operate on the inmates of the prison, but to deter others by the example of their sufferings; and finally, that as a means of preventing crimes, it is in fact the most economical. A superficial view of this subject has too frequently led to erroneous conclusions in some of our sister States. The operation of this system diminishing the number of convicts to be maintained by society, of course in some measure diminishes its expense: but

the maintenance of criminals, whilst they are confined in prison, constitutes but a small portion of the actual, enormous, and unequal expenditure to which they subject society—their trial and conviction, the support of a numerous and vigilant police to prevent, detect, and punish offences, &c. are onerous but indispensable items. Criminals, when not in prison, are in fact supported at an increased cost by the public. The ravages of the incendiary, the fraud of the counterfeiter, the depredation of the burglar and robber, constitute an unequal, a grievous, an incalculable tax on those members of society, who in general are least able to endure the exaction. The habits of criminals tend to pauperism, always to idleness; they are consumers, not producers; their evil example occasions wide spread corruption, terror, and misery. What economist can therefore calculate the real cost of crime? The expenditures in the Penitentiary compose but an insignificant comparative item: that partial view is indeed limited, which is confined by its walls. As “the Pennsylvania system of Prison Discipline” effects, not indeed the extirpation, but the prevention or diminution of crime, to an unknown and unrivalled extent—the dictates of mere economy, of sordid self-interest, as well as of patriotism, humanity, and religion, cry aloud for its general adoption. The prime cost of an efficient labour saving machine is never considered by the intelligent and wealthy capitalist as a wasteful expenditure, but as a productive investment. This Penitentiary will be, strictly speaking, an apparatus for the expeditious, certain, and economical eradication of vice, and the production of reformation. The State of Pennsylvania has exhibited, at once, her wisdom, philanthropy, and munificence, by the erection of this immense and expensive structure, which, in connexion with her other noble institutions, will largely contribute to the amelioration and protection of her population.

G. W. S.

